

1] The 20th century bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church, St. Nikolai Velimirovic, once wrote: 'Our religion is founded on spiritual experience, seen and heard as surely as any physical fact in this world, not theory, not philosophy, not human emotions but experience.'

2] What we celebrate this night, what we experience this night, comes to us, firstly, not through the speculations and dreams of the human mind; not through the hopes and fears of our innermost feelings; not through the statements and definitions of Christian doctrine; nor even through what is published and proclaimed in the holy scriptures. This night comes to us, primarily, through the experience of the apostles themselves.

3] The divine mystery of the resurrection of Christ was established by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the Church and passed on to us through Holy Tradition. What was witnessed, what was experienced, by those who saw and recognised the risen Christ has become our experience as well. This is the foundation of our Orthodox Christian religion.

4] Think of that word, recognised: the eleven apostles, the myrrh-bearing women, the seventy and more than five hundred at one time, St Paul tells us, recognised the risen Christ. Analyse that word: it means to know once again. The apostles' experience was not founded on a faith like ours; they did not believe in the resurrection as a matter of intellectual ascent. They knew Christ was risen, for they had seen and met the risen Christ. They knew Christ had risen in actuality. And in turn, our faith is founded on that knowledge. Only then were the scriptures written down as a witness; only then is Orthodox doctrine established. Truly, as St Nikolai wrote, our religion is founded on spiritual experience.

5] St John Chrysostom reminded us this night that whether we have fasted or not fasted, whether we have laboured long in the Lord's service or have been neglectful, this night we are invited to

enter into the joy of the Lord, even at the eleventh hour. Our Orthodox Christian faith nowhere assures us of happiness in this life. In a time-bound world nothing is everlasting. It is a delusion, at times, even demonic, to imagine that we can finally be happy in this world. People may seek happiness according to their own inclinations. Even the Constitution of the United States only proclaimed the right to pursue happiness; it could not grant it. Indeed, in St John's gospel we read of Christ warning and, yet, encouraging His disciples, 'In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' [Jn.16:33]

6] As for everlasting happiness and eternal bliss, we must await that in the kingdom of God. But in the meantime, on this night, we can know, we can experience, joy; the joy of our Lord. Let us ask ourselves, is there any other thing, any other place, any other remembrance that proclaims the gospel, the good news that Christ is risen and, therefore, we are risen? No! Only here, in the Church, within the body of Christ, only here can we know that joy that changes the whole purpose, the whole direction, the whole meaning of our human experience. Truly, our religion is founded on spiritual experience.

7] For we know the Lord in the Faith, in our liturgy, in our holy scriptures, in the holy icons, and like the apostles Luke and Cleopas at Emmaus, we know that the Lord is risen in the breaking of Bread, as we do this night. So be joyful this night; let your experience of this night be a joyful one. The introduction to the Anaphora invites us to lift up our heart, so let our hearts be on high, so that when we leave here this night, and encounter the world that does not know Christ and His glorious resurrection, we too, like the apostle John, can say we have beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Christ is risen!.